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New Breed of Agent

How Soviet Espionage Works

Soviet intelligence operatives have been engaged in an array of activities in the Bay Area besides electronic eavesdropping, according to C. Roy McKinnon, chief of the FBI office here.

He said at least 14 of the 42 employees at the Russian consulate in San Francisco are members of the KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency.

In Russian its initials stand for the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, the Committee for State Security, which runs the country's foreign and domestic intelligence.

KGB agents at the Soviet consulate are busily cultivating Bay Area residents for

sensitive information and, in some cases, recruiting them as spies, McKinnon said.

Another government official, who asked not to have his name or agency identified, cited specific recent cases:

- A Sunnyvale metallurgist, he said, was approached — unsuccessfully — for information on the heat-resistant materials used in missile nose cones.

- Several San Francisco bank officials were asked for in-house economic and agricultural forcecasts, which they delivered after notifying the FBI.

- A Redwood City company was asked for information on a luggage conveyor system for commercial airports, but found that the Soviet visitor to its offices was actually more interested in its plans for a military airfield in the Bay Area.

The FBI's McKinnon said the Soviet agents from the consulate are part of a new breed of spy meticulously trained by the 400,000-member KGB.

They are often young and attractive, McKinnon said. They speak fluent English. They are well-versed in the mores of American culture. And they often tell deprecating and disarming jokes about their own country.

Their initial contacts are invariably the same: friendly, low-keyed and seemingly innocuous.

"Usually they start very slowly, and, in a number of cases right

here in the Bay Area, they have ended up developing their contacts into outright intelligence agents for the Russians," said McKinnon.

KGB agents at the consulate include known agents expelled from other countries, among them a vice consul, Vasilii Ilich Khlopyanov, who was expelled from Thailand in 1971 as a KGB agent, and Vladimir Alexandrov, the commercial vice consul, who was expelled from Italy in 1970 for spying.

A State Department security officer stationed here declined to explain why known agents are allowed at the consulate without protest. But another source unofficially gave one rationale:

"It's easier for counterintelligence people to keep track of the KGB agents when we know who they are."

McKinnon declined to say how many of the 300 FBI agents assigned to his San Francisco office have counterintelligence duties.

In addition to the 42 employees at the Russian consulate here, 58 wives and family members enjoy the same diplomatic immunity. Most of them live away from the consulate.

The Marine Exchange here reports that in the past few years an average of 100 Soviet ships a year have docked in the Bay Area, mainly in Alameda. "Hundreds of these sailors roam around, and we know that a number of them have been involved in espionage," said McKinnon. "We have very little check on these crews."

Meanwhile, the ambience at the consulate here — from the outside, anyhow — is almost somnolent. "They are very friendly," said Lewis Griggs, a nearby resident, who echoed the sentiments of seven other neighbors interviewed.

What do the people in the consulate have to say?

Despite repeated efforts by The Chronicle to reach various consular officials via telephone, none of them returned the calls.

—William Moose

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